

Jesus' View of the Cross: Slain From the Creation

of the World of the World



Thrust Statement: Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God slain from the creation of the world.

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:45; Revelation 13:8; Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20

As one reflects upon the Cross of Christ, one is immediately confronted with a love that defies comprehension in its fulness. The Cross of Jesus is an excellent commentary on the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).^[1] What does the Cross of Jesus mean to you? Was the Cross of Christ an afterthought on the part of God? Was the Cross of Christ the intentional will of God? In other words, was it God’s intentional will from the beginning of creation of the world that Christ should go to the cross as a sacrificial lamb to be slain for the sins of humanity?

In 1944, Leslie D. Weatherhead (1893-1976) delivered a series of five lectures on “The Will of God.”^[2] Overall this book is an excellent treatment on the will of God. But, having said that, one must read parts of this book with extreme care and caution. In this short book (55 pages), he advances the notion that the Cross of Christ was not a part of the “intentional” will of God. Without any proof to verify his presupposition, he writes,

Was it God’s intention from the beginning that Jesus should go to the Cross? I think the answer to that question must be No. I don’t think Jesus thought that at the beginning of his ministry. He came with the intention that men should follow him, not kill him.^[3]

Just a perusal of the Scriptures refutes this statement by Weatherhead. In spite of Weatherhead’s sincerity and scholarship, the Word of God sets forth the idea that the Cross of Christ was not an afterthought on the part of God nor was it a human accident.

John, who wrote five books of the New Testament, records an insightful note about the Cross and crucifixion of Jesus that refutes any notion that the crucifixion of Jesus came about as an afterthought on the part of God, or, in the words of Weatherhead, the “circumstantial will of God.”^[4]

Listen to John as he speaks of the Lamb of God as having been slain from the creation of the world: “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (**Revelation 13:8**). The KJV reads: “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”^[5] Even before the universe was spoken into existence, it was decreed that the Son should die for the sins of the world. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, addresses the crucifixion this way: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (**Acts 2:23**). Again, some years later, Peter addresses God’s elect concerning the death of Jesus this way:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (**1 Peter 1:18-21**).

In Peter’s first epistle (early 60s), he sets forth the idea that God knew beforehand—before the creation of the world—that it would be necessary for Christ to redeem fallen humanity through His death upon the Cross. The Cross of Christ was not the “circumstantial will of God,” but rather the “intentional will of God.” Paul, too, confirms the words of Peter in his Epistle to the Ephesians (early 60s). In this Book, Paul unfolds this “mystery of his will” (**1:9**) hidden from ages past (**3:9**). In the unfolding of this “mystery,” he writes: “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight” (**1:4**). This “administration of God’s grace” (**3:2**) is also expressed as “the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly” (**3:3**). This mystery involved the creation of a new humanity in which both Jew and Gentile would be reconciled unto God in “one body” “through the cross” (**2:16**). Once more, how did God accomplish this feat? For Paul, God brought this about through the Cross of Christ:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (**2:14-18**).

Whenever one speaks of the Cross of Christ, one speaks of the Gospel of Christ, which is the “mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things” (3:9). Yet again, Paul speaks of this “mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Is it any wonder that Paul cries out: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). Paul never tires of calling attention to the redemption of men and women as having existed in the mind of God even before the creation of the world. Paul, in his short letter to Titus (written probably between AD 63/65) writes:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— ² a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, ³ and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior (Titus 1:1-3).

Jesus’ Perception of His Death

The hope that men and women have today rests upon the promise of God “before the beginning of time.” God could accomplish this hope only “in” and “through” Christ. When Christ came into this world, He had a consciousness of His mission—death on the Cross for the sins of humanity. As one reflects upon Jesus’ own understanding of His death, one finds some insight by reading the narrative about two men walking on the road to Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13). This event took place on the day of the Resurrection of Jesus (24:13). One discovers from Jesus’ conversation with these two men that neither individual believed the prophets who foretold about the sufferings of Christ (24:17-24). Jesus rebukes these men for their refusal to believe:

He said to them, “**How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ- have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (24:25-26).**

Following these comments by Jesus, Luke informs Theophilus (1:3) that Jesus explained the events concerning Himself, as revealed by the Scriptures, by “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets” (24:27). Luke informs his reader that after Jesus ate with these men from Emmaus (24:30), these two disciples went to Jerusalem and found the Eleven and those with them (24:33). While together, Jesus suddenly appeared among them all (24:36). Again, one encounters disbelief on the part of the gathered disciples (24:38). Following this incident, Jesus, as he had done earlier with the two men from Emmaus, unfolded the words of the “Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (24:44) concerning His mission and suffering on the Cross:

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things (24:46-48).

The death of Christ upon the cross was within the divine will of God the Father as well as the divine will of Jesus. His death was a necessity for the salvation of men and women. Jesus voluntarily laid down His life in order to accomplish the eternal plan of God. John records a conversation about this death in the very words of the Master Himself:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

In the final phase of Jesus' earthly ministry, He informed His disciples about His impending death in Jerusalem (**Mark 10:33-34**; see also **Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**). Following the announcement of His death, the disciples got into a rather heated argument over who was the greatest. This controversy erupted over a request made by James and John (**Mark 10:35-41**). In this discussion, Jesus intervened and explained how to be great in His kingdom. But the last words of Jesus in this pericope (The Request of James and John, **10:35-45**), Jesus reveals His objective in coming into the world. In this startling statement, He unfolds His purpose: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**10:45**). Thus, in a sense, Jesus was slain from the creation of the world. Jesus came into the world to give His life as a ransom for the sins of the world. Yes, one can say that it was God's "intentional" will that Jesus should die as "a ransom for the sins of the world."

The Old Testament Prophecies

Warren W. Wiersbe is correct when he writes: "The cross was a divine assignment, not a human accident; it was a God-given obligation, not a human option."^[6] The Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice—Jesus the savior of the world. By His death upon the cross, Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system and put an end to it. As one reflects upon the shedding of the blood of Christ upon the cross, one can hardly fail to recall the words of Moses as recorded in **Leviticus 17:11**: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." It is in this vein that the author of Hebrews writes:

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴ For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. ²⁵ Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his

own. ²⁶ Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself ([Hebrews 9:23-26](#)).

Through a system of sacrifices, God gave Israel a shadow of His plan of redemption for lost humanity. For God to accomplish a true atonement for the sins of mankind, He prepared a body for this final sacrifice—one of the Trinity. The author of Hebrews gives a statement made by Jesus concerning His body prepared for this ultimate sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—have come to do your will, O God.’” ⁸ First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). ⁹ Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all ([Hebrews 10:5-10](#)).

No wonder John informs his readers: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” ([John 1:14](#)). Jesus gave Himself as the burnt offering in order to make atonement—pay the price—for the offenses against God. The death of Jesus fulfilled the entire sacrificial system and put an end to the sacrificial system set up by God through Moses. He accomplished what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, that is, “take away sins” ([Hebrews 10:4](#)). John the Baptist, as far as we know, was the first one to announce the sacrificial death of Jesus: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ([John 1:29](#)). By His death upon the Cross, Jesus put an end to the old system of sacrifices for ever.

Baptism of Jesus

As one continues to seek to understand the “intentional” will of God, the baptism of Jesus also helps to unfold this divine mystery hidden from ages past. Does the baptism of Jesus also prefigure the “intentional” will of God concerning the crucifixion? The baptism of Jesus is not commonly pictured as a symbol of His impending death, but, on the other hand, one cannot help but wonder if the baptism of Jesus did not represent His sacrificial death. John knew that this One coming to be baptized was not One who stood in need of repentance. At first, John refused to baptize Jesus but consented at the insistence of Jesus. Jesus let John know upfront that it was necessary: “**Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness**” ([Matthew 3:15](#)). Jesus knew that this baptism was His Father’s will. The question that confronts every believer is: To whom does the “us” refer? The following comments by Warren w. Wiersbe are well worth citing in full:

We read these words casually, but they raise some difficult questions. To whom does the pronoun “us” refer? Does it include John? If it does, then we have a problem explaining how a sinful man could help a holy God “fulfill all righteousness.” One solution is to forget John and note that the entire Godhead was involved in this important event. God the Father spoke from heaven; God the Son went into the water, and God the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove. Doesn’t this suggest that “us” refers to the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Isn’t it God who fulfills all righteousness by giving his Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world?

The New American Standard Bible translates Matthew 3:15 “for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” In what way? In the way illustrated by his baptism: death, burial, and resurrection. In fact, Jesus used baptism as a picture of his passion: “But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished” (Luke 12:50). He also identified himself with the experience of John (Matt. 12:38-40; Luke 11:30), and again we see the image of the death, burial, and resurrection.^[7]

Death of Christ

As one peruses the Gospel of John, one quickly discovers that the sacrificial lamb is just one of several pictures of Christ’s death. Immediately following John the Baptist’s remarks about the Lamb of God (**John 1:29, 36**), John, the apostle, gives the comments of Jesus concerning His death, which reveals quite tellingly Jesus’ view of the Cross: “**Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days**” (**John 2:19**). Prior to this statement, Jesus and His disciples had gone to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover (**2:15**). Upon their arrival, Jesus became infuriated with individuals who had made the house of God a den of thieves. As a result of this encounter, Jesus “scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables” (**2:15**). These individuals wanted to know by what authority He did this (**2:18**). But in their request about this authority, the Jews wanted to know what miraculous sign He could do to prove that He had the authority to run them out of the Temple (**2:18**). This request precipitated his remarks about destroying this temple (**2:19**). After the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle remembered these words: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken” (**2:22**).

Again, John records for his readers a third reference to the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the Cross. Jesus talks with Nicodemus about His crucifixion. In this conversation Jesus says: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life” (**3:14-15**). The verb “lifted up” (ὑψώσω, *jj&uyow*) has a dual meaning in John—(1) lifting up on the Cross, and (2) exaltation to heaven. For example, in **John 8:28**, Jesus says: “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” On the other hand, one discovers that this verb may also have reference to the glorification of Christ: “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (**12:32**). The Cross was not the end of His glory, but it was the means of His glory. It is in this vein that Peter proclaims: “Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear” (**Acts**

2:33).

Just as the serpent was lifted up on a pole (see [Numbers 21:5-9](#)), so the Son of Man was lifted up on a cross to save us from sin and death. By looking on Jesus Christ through faith, we, too, can be delivered from death. On the cross, Jesus became a curse for us in order to redeem us from the curse of the law ([Galatians 3:13](#)). It was the substitutionary death of Jesus that brought about deliverance from death. The Jews had a difficult time understanding how the Messiah could be crucified. Listen once more to a conversation between Jesus and the crowd:

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.³⁴ The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” ([John 12:32-34](#)).

The Jews recalled the words of Moses:

If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree,²³ you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance ([Deuteronomy 21:22-23](#)).

How could He “remain forever” and, at the same time, be crucified? The cross of Christ was a mystery. Jesus was like the serpent lifted up. He was like a criminal cursed upon a tree. Paul expresses the dilemma this way to the Corinthians: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)).

Jesus did not speak openly about his death until after Peter’s confession in Caesarea Philippi ([Matthew 16:13-21](#)). Peter upon hearing the words of Jesus about His impending death took Him aside and rebuked the Master ([16:22](#)). Following Peter’s outburst of surprise, Jesus rebuked him for not thinking the things of God ([16:23](#)). The death of Christ was a necessity for the salvation of humanity. The death of Christ had been decreed before the “creation of the world.” The disciples were stunned at such an announcement of His impending death. Following the Mount of Transfiguration ([17:1-8](#)), Jesus, for a second time, announced His death ([17:22-23](#)). While on the Mount, God spoke directly from heaven and added something that He had not added earlier in His first announcement ([3:17](#)) at the Baptism of Jesus—“Listen to him” ([17:5](#)). The following is a chart of these two episodes:

Matthew 3:17	Matthew 17:5
And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”	While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. <u>Listen to him!</u> ”

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God wanted the disciples of Jesus to pay attention to the words of Jesus concerning His death. Yet again, in [Matthew 20:17-19](#), Jesus speaks of His death:

Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, ¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!”

Even to the very end, the disciples did not comprehend the significance of the events Jesus forewarned them about. Right up to the bitter end, Peter was still willing to fight to prevent the crucifixion.

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” ([Matthew 26:47-54](#)).

CONCLUSION

Was the crucifixion of Jesus the “intentional” will of God? One can say an emphatic “yes” to the question! The Scriptures foretold of this event; therefore, the death of Christ had to occur. It is through the cross of Jesus that God has secured salvation for all who believe. Is it any wonder that Paul cried out: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” ([Galatians 6:14](#)). Do you boast in the cross of Christ as the means of your salvation? Or do you boast in your own good works for salvation? Is it any wonder that Paul, in his first letter to Corinth, exalted the cross as the basis of one’s salvation? Listen to him as he captures the wonder of it all:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified ([1 Corinthians 2:1-2](#)).

The cross of Christ was not the “circumstantial” will of God, but rather, the “intentional” will of God. Jesus came to die that through His death we might live. Jesus was slain from the beginning of the creation (**Revelation 13:8**) for the sins of humanity. The following words of the apostle Peter tell it all:

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (**1 Peter 1:20-21**).

^[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

^[2] Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Will of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1944).

^[3] Ibid., 12; see also pp. 20 and 32.

^[4] See Ibid., 12, where he writes concerning his concept of the “circumstantial will of God”:

But when circumstances wrought by men’s evil set up such a dilemma that Christ was compelled either to die or to run away, then *in those circumstances* the Cross was the will of God, but only in those circumstances which were themselves the fruit of evil.

^[5] *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982).

^[6] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Cross of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). I am indebted to Wiersbe for the flow of my thoughts in this sermon.

^[7] Wiersbe, *The Cross of Jesus*, 14.